



96th SIEGE BATTERY

R. G. A.



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HISTORICAL RECORD OF 96th SIEGE BATTERY R.G.A.



THE 96th Siege Battery was formed at Pembroke Dock by Major C. H. M. Sturges on January 1st, 1916, on the establishment laid down in War Establishments, Part VII, New Armies, 1915, for four 6-in., four 8-in., and four 9·2-in. howitzers.

The personnel of the Battery consisted of Glamorgan Territorial R.G.A. (Capt. W. R. Brown, Lieut. M. Vyvyan, 2nd Lieut. S. Evans, with ninety N.C.O.'s and men, including two N.C.O.'s of each rank) and sixty-four men drawn from R.G.A. recruits at Pembroke Dock, the N.C.O.'s being supplied by O.C. " B " Siege Depot, Bexhill. 2nd Lieut. H. N. Norman, R.G.A., and Tempy. 2nd Lieut. W. N. Carpenter, R.G.A., completed the establishment of officers.

On February 4th, 1916, the Battery moved by rail to Sheerness for training, there being no howitzers at Pembroke Dock, and was accommodated in temporary huts on the Well Marsh until March 13th, when it proceeded by rail to Lydd, where it remained until April 26th. The results of the practice there were most satisfactory, and the observation of flashes at night carried out by the Battery constituted a record for Lydd. At the conclusion of practice, the Commandant described the drill and training of the Battery as very good. On April 26th the 96th moved by rail to Stockcross, near Newbury, to mobilize as a 9·2-in. howitzer battery—the first battery to mobilize at Stockcross.

After a very pleasant month spent in camp, where guns, stores, etc., were received, the Battery left for France, Capt. W. R. Brown going first on May 20th with two N.C.O.'s and twelve men as an advance party, proceeding from Southampton to Havre, while on the same day 2nd Lieut. Carpenter and twenty-six N.C.O.'s and men left by road with lorries and stores. Next day, 2nd Lieut. Evans

and twelve N.C.O.'s and men escorted the guns by rail to Avonmouth. These two latter parties rejoined the main body at Charing Cross on May 24th, when the Battery left for Folkestone. Arriving at 6.45 p.m. on the same day, the Battery marched to No. 3 Rest Camp, St. Martin's, Boulogne.

On May 28th a move was made to DOULLENS, the guns by rail and the personnel and lorries by road, halting for the night at RUISSEAUVILLE, and, after detraining the guns, the Battery went to AUTHIEULE for the night and on to ST. AMAND the next day, leaving guns, lorries, and caterpillars at AUTHIEULE. At ST. AMAND the guns, stores, etc., of the 62nd Siege Battery were taken over, the final transfer taking place on June 6th, when the 62nd finally handed over and left with the guns and stores of the 96th Battery.

An organized bombardment of the enemy's trenches began on June 25th, the Battery firing on the first day 200 rounds, on the second 178, third 199, fourth 142, fifth *nil*, sixth 120, and seventh, 876. Sergt. W. Rawlings died of gas poisoning while digging up a shell on June 29th.

Assault on Gommecourt.

On July 5th the left section was slewed round to cover the MONCHY area. During the sixty-five minute "intense" bombardment on July 1st, No. 1 gun fired 120 rounds, No. 4 114 rounds, Nos. 2 and 3 about 90 rounds. Oil boiled in the buffers of all guns. During the twenty-four hours from 4 p.m., June 30th, to 4 p.m., July 1st, the Battery fired 996 rounds. The assault on GOMMECOURT on July 1st was unsuccessful. The 56th and 46th Divisions north and south of the salient penetrated the enemy's third line, but were driven out by counter-attacks.

On the night of the 19th-20th July, the right section moved from ST. AMAND to BIENVILLERS to take up counter-battery work. The guns arrived at 10 p.m., but were not in position until 7.30 a.m. the next morning. The right section came under the 29th H.A.G. for fighting, though the whole battery remained under the 19th H.A.G.

for administration. On July 21st No. 60560 Gunner Eagle was wounded. From this time, owing to lack of ammunition, the Battery was inactive, but three observation posts (one for counter-battery and two for defence of the line) were manned.

Lieut. Hyde (D.O.), R.G.A., arrived from England on August 11th, and on August 13th Capt. W. R. Brown, Glamorgan R.G.A., left for England to join a new battery. At the same time one sergeant and two corporals were sent home, and a corporal and two acting bombardiers arrived from England to take their place. To replace a gun of the 12th Siege Battery which had been destroyed by shell fire, No. 3 gun was dispatched to MARICOURT on July 31st, while on September 12th No. 4 gun was brought up to join the right section at BIENVILLERS. This gun was dismantled at 8 p.m., and was in action in the new position at 7 a.m. on September 2nd. The observation post at MONCHY was abandoned and an observation post at COLONEL'S WALK manned. At the same time the whole battery was brought into the 48th H.A.G. until September 13th, when it again came under the 19th H.A.G. The detachment of the missing gun was employed from September 1st in constructing an 8-in. position at HANNESCAMPs, working by night and sleeping by day. On September 14th a gun was taken over from the 143rd Siege Battery at BAYENCOURT and was brought into action that night at BIENVILLERS, again bringing the battery strength up to four guns.

Battle of the Somme.

A period of activity in counter-battery work began from September 15th. During the night 18th-19th No. 2 gun was slewed 12° S. in continuous heavy rain. Considerable success with aeroplane observation on batteries was obtained, and on the 26th September 566 rounds were fired at batteries in the neighbourhood of PUISIEUX in connection with the attack by the Army on our right. Thus, from September 15th, the 96th may be said to have been directly taking part in the Battle of the SOMME. After the heavy firing on September 26th, No. 3 gun sank about 3 feet, and No. 2 gun about

2 feet. At 5 p.m. work was begun on these guns, No. 3 gun being completely dismantled and the platform relaid, and No. 2 gun being bodily jacked up by a gyn, four screwjacks, and a 14-ft. lever. Fortunately the weather was fine, and the guns were again in action at 10 a.m. on the following day. Nos. 1 and 4 guns had also to be jacked up during this period of counter-battery work.

On October 4th a very trying period for the Battery began. The Battery was ordered to move to a new position at BERLES, on the night of the 4th-5th. On the night of the 3rd, guns were dismantled to free the platforms, which were sent to BERLES with laying detachments. Work was begun at 6 a.m. on the 4th, and all platforms were laid during the day. In the evening the ammunition, stores, etc., were loaded on lorries and sent off, and the caterpillars drew the guns out of BIENVILLERS. Owing to congestion of traffic on the POMMIER-BERLES road it was midnight by the time the guns reached BERLES.

The new position was difficult to get into, and not until 12 noon on the following day were the guns mounted. Heavy rain fell most of the time, which made the ground a sea of mud. After a short pause for dinner, work was resumed and guns were squared up and camouflaged, etc. At tea-time all ranks were thoroughly exhausted, but at 7 p.m. orders were received to return to BIENVILLERS.

In spite of their state, all hands set to work at once and worked all through the night dismantling the guns in order to free the platforms. At 7 a.m. this was done. Platforms, ammunition, and stores were loaded in lorries and sent to BIENVILLERS, and guns were dismantled ready for the caterpillars.

The men were now dropping from exhaustion, and were again given some rest, resuming work after dinner at 2 p.m. In the meantime (at 10 a.m., 6th), orders were received to return to BERLES. Stores, ammunition, etc., were again loaded and sent to BERLES, and guns were mounted at this place, the men turning in at 2 a.m. on the 7th.

The work may be summarized as follows :

October 3rd, 5 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. : Dismounting guns and firing platforms.

October 4th, 6 a.m. to October 6th, 7 a.m. (49 hours) : Mostly heavy work in mud and rain.

October 6th, 2 p.m. to October 7th, 2 a.m. : Twelve hours' work.

Thus the Battery had sixty-one hours hard work in mud and rain with about four hours' sleep. This was a severe ordeal for the men, and a most creditable performance. Between October 4th and 6th the Battery was ordered to move from BIENVILLERS to BERLES, back to BIENVILLERS, and then again back to BERLES.

But this was not all. On September 29th the gun (barrel) borrowed from the 143rd Battery, was returned, and on October 7th a new barrel was received from England to replace it. On October 9th the Battery was hardly surprised, after its late experiences, to be again ordered back to BIENVILLERS. This move was carried out on the nights of 8th-9th and 9th-10th. On both nights BERLES was shelled with 5·9's. Whether this was due to the noise made by caterpillars or espionage is not clear. Ill-luck still dogged the Battery, for on the night of the 10th the old position at BIENVILLERS was shelled by 5·9's from 6.30 p.m. till 10·34 p.m., thirty-six shells being fired. On the morning of the 11th, fire was again opened on the Battery at 6.40 a.m. and continued until 11.40 a.m., 136 rounds being fired. Nos. 1 and 2 guns were both temporarily put out of action by splinters, and the billets occupied by the Battery were destroyed, but, fortunately, no one was hurt. The enemy's target was the 146th Siege Battery, about 50 yards behind the 96th, whose flashes had been picked up by an aeroplane about 5 p.m. on the 10th. Fire was directed by balloon.

At Hebuterne.

The next two days were spent in improving and strengthening the position in every possible way. On October 23rd a bombshell was dropped into the Battery in the shape of an order to move all personnel to the position of the 143rd Siege Battery at HEBUTERNE that evening. This position was within 1,100 yards of the enemy's line, and had our own machine guns behind it, while HEBUTERNE

enjoyed the reputation of being the most " strafed " village in the Third Army area. The Battery now came under the 48th H.A.G.

HEBUTERNE lived up to its reputation on the evening the Battery arrived there and was shelled with tear shell. The Battery entered their new position wearing gas helmets on a pitch dark night. The next day was very wet, the position becoming a morass. From the 22nd October onwards the enemy on this front became extraordinarily enterprising in the air, which was in marked contrast to his previous activity in this respect. From this date onwards on clear days enemy machines were continually up, sometimes as many as twelve being in the air together. This made aeroplane shoots from such a forward position a matter of great difficulty. Enemy aeroplanes at times passed over the Battery at a height of about 100 to 200 ft.

The Battery had great luck at HEBUTERNE, as, although frequently shelled, and dugouts on many occasions receiving direct hits, the only casualty was one man wounded by a rifle bullet. Over 1,500 rounds were fired at enemy batteries, and numerous O.K.'s were obtained. The principal object of this was the support of the attacks on BEAUMONT HAMEL.

On the night of November 23rd the Battery personnel returned to BIENVILLERS and again took over their own guns. On November 27th and 28th the Battery left BIENVILLERS for POMMIER. A considerable amount of firing was carried out during this time, both at trenches and batteries. Several organized bombardments of the enemy's trench system were carried out, notably the bombardment of MONCHY on December 13th.

A fairly enjoyable Christmas was spent at POMMIER, as the Battery were not called upon to fire on the 25th. Two days later, the Battery moved from POMMIER on loan to the 6th Corps. The position was left at 9 a.m., after continuous work from 3.30 p.m. the previous day. WANQUETIN was reached at noon, and that night a position was occupied at DAINVILLE, just south of ARRAS. Guns were mounted in the rain, the Battery being in action about noon on the 29th after a strenuous night's work. Fortunately, owing to weather conditions, the raid south-west of ARRAS had to

be postponed till January 6th, giving the Battery a few day's much-needed rest. On January 6th, 600 rounds were fired in support of the raid, which was successful.

That night guns were dismounted and platforms taken up. The weather was luckily fine, and all vehicles were clear by 5 a.m. The platforms, with the personnel, were sent straight to POMMIER, while the remainder parked at LARBRET. On the afternoon of January 8th platforms were laid in the old position, and that night the guns were brought up and mounted in continuous rain. As tractors were not allowed, the work was very heavy in spite of the assistance of thirty men from the 103rd Siege Battery. Guns were eventually brought into action at 12 noon on January 9th, all ranks being wet through and tired out.

On January 9th Capt. Gordon was again posted to the 11th Siege Battery, Capt. Derbyshire being posted to the 96th Siege Battery in his place. The Battery came under the 39th H.A.G. on January 9th, and later on under the 54th H.A.G. in the 18th Corps. On January 20th 2nd Lieut. J. B. Guyer joined from the 1/1 Lowland Heavy Battery.

Some successful counter-battery work was carried out during the hard frost at the end of January, including a series fired at night with sound ranging, this being the first occasion on which 9.2 howitzers had been ranged by sound. Lieut. H. T. Hyde was attached to the 11th Siege Battery on March 11th. Lieut. A. H. Lister, from the 131st Heavy Battery, was attached to the 96th, while Capt. Derbyshire and Lieut. Hyde left for England on March 17th for duty with new units.

The enemy began their memorable retirement from the ANCRE on February 26th, and on February 28th our old target, in the shape of GOMMECOURT, was occupied by us. GOMMECOURT had received considerable damage from the 96th during the past nine months and was visited by members of the Battery with considerable interest. In the course of his subsequent retirement the enemy soon became out of range, and a move was made north to WAILLY on March 20th. From there some hundreds of rounds were fired at the Hindenburg

Line south of NEUVILLE VITASSE, and, in order to get better range for the forthcoming battle, the sections were split and moved, the right section to BOISLEUX AU MONT and the left to AGNY, on April 2nd.

Battle of Arras.

The right section was the first 9·2-in. unit to drop their trails in enemy soil on this front. On the 4th the artillery preparation for the great offensive east of ARRAS began, and the Battery was kept hard at it for the next ten days. On April 9th the 3rd Army attack was delivered with satisfactory results, and on the 10th the Battery began a further forward movement, coming into action at BOIRY BECQUERELLE in a snowstorm on the 12th. The hard firing was now beginning to tell on the guns and mountings, and, owing to a variety of causes, one section only was with difficulty kept in action. Broken elevating shafts, earth boxes, and platforms, all contributed to the difficulty experienced in keeping the guns going. Such guns as could be got into action were kept busy, and ammunition continuously streamed in on the lorries and out of the muzzles. The hard work was carried out in wintry weather, and the conditions were not improved by the devastated state of the roads and villages vacated by the enemy. The weather then improved, and on the whole the fortnight spent at BOIRY was not too bad. On the 23rd a further attack was made with varying fortune opposite FONTAINE. After an initial success we had to retire to our former positions, but, further north, GUEMAPPE was taken, and our line was advanced opposite WANCOURT.

On the 26th and 27th of April the Battery moved by sections to a position in a sunken road just east of HENIN SUR COJEUL. This time the weather fortunately kept fine, and the Battery soon settled down in bivouacs cut into the bank of the road. Lieut. Norman was attached to the 7th Corps H.A. Staff from the 27th, and on May 1st Lieut. Lane and Lieut. Haveland were posted to the Battery, but the latter proceeded at once to the 213th Siege Battery, to which he had been attached.

A further attack was made on May 3rd, but again, after an initial success, we had to resume our former position. From the 3rd a continuous bombardment of the Hindenburg Line was begun. On the 11th the Battery had their first piece of bad luck as regards casualties. A stray shell pitched behind No. 3 gun and killed Cpl Jones and Gunner Mitchell, wounding Gunners Morecombe, Coombes, Nicholls, and Coleman.

At the end of April, a Corps Heavy Artillery Rest Camp was instituted at MONCHIET, and each battery sent batches of one officer and twenty-eight other ranks for a week at a time. The rest was thoroughly appreciated by all ranks. On May 19th Lieut. Lane proceeded to Base depot, Havre, medically unfit. On the night of May 25th-26th the right section moved to ST. LEGER, to a position that had been occupied by the 203rd Siege Battery, followed by the left section on the night of May 30th-31st.

The personnel of the Battery, with the exception of one officer and thirty-six other ranks who remained in charge of the guns, moved on May 31st into rest for nine days at LA CAUCHIE. During this period, 2nd Lieut. Jones, attached from 175th Siege Battery, joined. The personnel of the Battery returned to the guns on June 10th, and on the following day 2nd Lieut. Howarth arrived. The Battery was kept fairly busy from June 10th to July 10th both on counter-battery and trench work. Various attacks were made on the Hindenburg support line south-west of FONTAINE, with varying results. Some progress was made about YORK TRENCH, and the Hindenburg front line was captured up to BULLECOURT.

Transfer to Canadian Corps.

Severing its connection with the 7th Corps after a period of nearly fourteen months, the Battery was transferred to the Canadian Corps, 1st Army. About 12,000 rounds had been fired during the time the 96th had served with the 3rd Army in France. The casualties were three killed and eight wounded. Capt. Vyvyan and 2nd Lieut. Evans were mentioned in despatches, and Sergt. Chance was

commended by the Corps Commander for an act of gallantry at WANQUETIN. On transfer to the 1st Army, 2nd Lieut. Norman was retained on 7th Corps H.Q. Staff. Of the officers who left England with the Battery only Major Sturges, Capt. Vyvyan, and Lieut. Evans now remained, and of the sergeants only Sergt. Chance. The other ranks had similarly been depleted by transfer, sickness, etc.

On the 12th a move was made via TILLOY to LIEVIN, where the guns were mounted on the 14th, seventy-six rounds being fired on the following day. LIEVIN appeared anything but a pleasant spot, and reminded the Battery of the old HEBUTERNE days.

The Canadian Corps kept the Battery very busy, programme shoots of from 300 to 500 rounds being arranged for each day. On July 20th Gunner Jefferies was killed by a stray shell, and the following day Gunner Stark was wounded. The enemy heavily shelled the position all the morning of the 22nd, putting three of the guns out of action, and using, it is estimated, about 600 rounds 8-in. and 5.9-in., while on the following day No. 1 gun was heavily shelled for half an hour and temporarily put out of action. About 200 rounds of 5.9-in. were used. Sergt. Coulson and Cpl. Guy were killed and Gunner Eagle wounded. No. 4 gun was brought into action with parts from the remaining guns, and fresh sites were found for Nos. 1 and 3. No. 2 gun's cradle was split in half and had to be sent to workshops. This was the first occasion on which the Battery had been definitely located and ranged upon with aeroplane, the reason being the large amount of firing it was called upon to do at all hours of the day and night and the poor nature of the flash cover in this part of the country. Enemy aeroplanes were extremely active at this time.

On the night of August 14th, the eve of the assault, the Battery was heavily shelled with gas and H.F. In spite of this, 120 rounds were fired and many lorries of ammunition unloaded. Bombardier Staines, Gunner Wain, Gunner Neill, and Gunner Moore were killed on this most unpleasant night, and Gunner Taylor was wounded.

The activity on counter-battery work culminated in the attack on Hill 70 on August 15th. This successful enterprise was followed

by various other attacks made with varying success up to August 26th, when bad weather began to interfere with operations. No. 2 gun then broke an elevating shaft, and No. 4 gun's carriage and bed were sent back for repair.

The position of the 79th Siege Battery was on August 26th taken over with one gun in action, the 79th going into rest for ten days. Capt. Vyvyan was awarded the Military Cross on August 20th. The night of September 6th saw the Battery again bombarded with gas shell, and three days later a fourteen days' rest at DIVION was greatly enjoyed by all. Lieut. Sanders, from 152nd Howitzer Battery, joined the 96th on the 11th.

A reluctant return was made to LIEVIN on the 25th, the contrast between pretty village scenes and ugly ruins not being much appreciated. The Battery was so frequently shelled at LIEVIN that the occasions have not always been recorded, but on the evening of September 27th, from about 7.30 p.m. till 9 p.m., a stream of 5.9 in. was poured into the position, the principal gun to suffer being No. 2. Sergt. Weatherburn, Bombardier Swainston, and Gunner Marwood were killed during this bombardment, the cellar which they occupied being blown in. A fresh position was found for No. 2 gun, and the gun was brought into action in its new position on October 1st. All guns had now changed their centre line from 65° grid to 90° grid.

Life at Pervyse.

The Battery, which had been transferred from the 15th H.A.G. to the 2nd Canadian H.A.G. on August 20th, was ordered on October 5th to pull out two guns, take over two from the 175th Siege Battery, and proceed north. After packing and arranging stores at MARLES LES MINES the Battery marched north as follows: October 8th, MERVILLE; October 9th, EECKE; October 10th, HOOGSTADE. On the night of the 10th platforms were sent up to PERVYSE, and all guns, except A sub, which was deficient of parts, were mounted next night. The position was not encouraging, as the Battery was very congested and the flash cover practically *nil*, while it was, in addition, the most forward of the heavy artillery.

Close to the Battery was a dressing station which had been run for three years by two English ladies, the Baroness de T'serclaes and Miss Chisholm, whose adventures are recorded in their book "The Cellar-House of Pervyse." Naturally, the Battery was not greeted by them with enthusiasm.

Lieut. Jones and 2nd Lieut. Hammond joined the Battery on the evening of October 18th. A bombardment of the enemy's batteries and defences began on October 22nd, a considerable amount of firing taking place every day. For the first week the enemy made practically no reply, but after that his retaliation became very heavy, and on October 29th an enemy 5.9 in. battery ranged on the 96th, firing 250 rounds and putting No. 3 gun temporarily out of action, while on November 5th there was an appropriate firework display, a concentration of 250 rounds from a 5.9 being thrown into the Battery from 3 p.m. till 3.45 p.m., doing, however, little damage. Lieut. Jones was promoted captain on November 6th, leaving the 96th on posting to the 169th Siege Battery and on the same day Lieut. Lane rejoined after an absence of nearly six months.

Nearly 5,000 rounds were fired from the PERVYSE position, mostly in counter-battery work. Toward the end of November the Battery was shelled daily. Although shooting was accurate, very little damage was done up to the end of the month.

On December 2nd the Battery was ordered to pull out and move to an "unknown destination." Without interference from the enemy, guns were pulled out and the 96th marched to what proved to be a well-known spot for them, close to LENS, halts being made at rest billets, POPERINGHE, MORBECQUE, and BETHUNE. While passing through POPERINGHE, BETHUNE, and NŒUX-LES-MINES three men were wounded and three lorries damaged. The bed of "B" subsection, which had been severely damaged by shell-fire, was left in Belgium. Platforms were laid at MAROC on December 7th, and guns were pulled in the same night.

During their visit to Belgium the Battery fired nearly 5,000 rounds, and, though severely shelled on several occasions, only three men

were hit, and these slightly. This in spite of the confident prediction of the Baroness de T'serclaes that, after the first two rounds, the Battery would be wiped out.

At MAROC the Battery came under the 64th Group, 1st Corps, and then, changing Groups in rapid succession, eventually came under the 91st H.A.G., Canadian Corps. Owing possibly to espionage, the Battery was heavily shelled after barely a week in MAROC, and after a violent bombardment on January 3rd, 1918, it was decided to move. As was the case in the previous year, no firing was called for on Christmas Day, 1917, which was fairly pleasantly spent in MAROC.

CITE DES ALOUETTES, to which the Battery moved from January 4th to January 8th, was a position which, in point of distance from the enemy, constituted a record, the range to the nearest Hun being over 6,000 yards. There were no complaints on this score, and by January 8th everyone was comfortably settled in hope that the rest of the winter might be spent there. On February 5th the Battery personnel moved to VILLERS AU BOIS for training for three weeks, the time being spent in musketry and Lewis gun instruction, gun drill, and a general smartening up. Returning to the position on February 26th, the Battery relieved the 1st Canadian Siege, who had been in charge of the guns.

On transfer to the R.F.C., Capt. Vyvyan, M.C., left the Battery on February 24th, thus leaving, of the original officers, only Major Sturges and Lieut. Evans. Second Lieuts. Sargent, Fahy, and Galloway joined during the training at VILLERS AU BOIS, bringing the total number of officers up to eleven. On March 12th Major Sturges received the Belgian Ordre de Leopold I and Croix de Guerre, and Lieut. Lister the Belgian Ordre de la Couronne and Croix de Guerre. About this time, Lieut. Sanders was promoted Captain.

Immediately after the return from VILLERS AU BOIS a considerable amount of shooting was carried out, principally on enemy pill-boxes and T.M. emplacements. On March 21st the big German attack developed from the SCARPE to the OISE, preceded by an artillery demonstration along the whole front. The 46th Division took over the front of the Northern Canadian Division on March 31st, and the

Battery came again under the 1st Corps, remaining in the same position. The German offensive stopped all leave, which had been going very well up to then. No one had been more than six months without leave, and all the officers had had leave just before. A battery canteen was opened at the end of March, which proved very popular and did a brisk trade. During April a large amount of firing was carried out, principally on hostile trench mortars and night harassing fire. On April 9th the enemy offensive from the LA BASSEE CANAL northwards opened. Capt. S. T. Evans left the Battery on transfer to the 69th Siege Battery, as second in command, on April 4th. During April and May the Battery was continuously employed on trench targets, principally trench mortars. On an average, about 100 rounds a day were fired at these, and all the hostile trench mortars from H26 to LENS were engaged, some of them as many as four times. This greatly reduced hostile trench-mortar fire on the front.

The Battery completed its second year in France on May 24th, one officer and fifty-seven other ranks being all that were left of the original personnel. It had taken part in the battles of the SOMME, ARRAS, HILL 70, and FLANDERS, and on several occasions had received congratulations from Corps for good work. It may be of interest here to state the names of Nos. 1, etc. :

A, Sub.	...	...	Sergt. Thornbury.
B, Sub.	...	...	Sergt. Guttridge.
C, Sub.	...	...	Sergt. Bond.
D, Sub.	...	...	Sergt. Jackson.
B.C. Staff	...	...	Sergt. Low.
B.C.A 's	...	...	Sergt. Bentley and Gunner Smith.
B.S.M.	...	...	Watkinson (afterwards Stevens).
B.Q.M.S.	...	...	Hudson.

By this time the Canadians had relieved the 1st Corps on the LENS front, and had been in turn relieved by the 18th Corps, under which the Battery now came. Sergt. T. Jackson was, on June 3rd, awarded a well-earned D.C.M. and Capt. S. T. Evans a M.C., which, though he had now left the Battery, was for services in the 96th.

“ It never rains but it pours.” In the same *Gazette* Sergt. Thornbury was awarded the M.S.M., and shortly afterwards Sergt. Jackson and Gunner Allcock received the Order of Leopold II (Chevalier) and Croix de Guerre, and Bombardier Keeley and Gunner Cullen the Croix de Guerre. A brigade tug-of-war competition was held on August 5th and was won by the Battery. Lt.-Col. Whitehead presented a prize of 100 francs to the winning team.

On the arrival of Lt.-Gen. Sir A. Hunter-Weston in relief of Lt.-Gen. Sir Ivor Maxse the 18th Corps changed its name, or rather number, and became the 8th Corps. Orders were received on August 18th to pull out that night and march south. The pleasant seven months at BULLY had come to an end. The Battery had been very fortunate in being able to remain in this comfortable position for so long, and as an elaborate bath-house had just been constructed, it was not surprising that a move was ordered. It is curious that these seven months spent by the 96th in such pleasant conditions should have been one of the most anxious and trying periods experienced by the B.E.F. as a whole. The trials and triumphs of the Entente from March to August, 1918, are a matter of history.

The Wotan Switch.

The guns were pulled out on the night of August 18th and moved to ARRAS CITADEL. The next day positions were prepared in BEAURAINS, near TELEGRAPH HILL, about 2,500 yards from the enemy front line. During the following days platforms were laid and the guns mounted. The headquarters of the Battery remained meanwhile at ARRAS CITADEL, where the excellent bathing facilities made the hot weather endurable. At 4 a.m. on August 26th the Canadian 2nd and 3rd Divisions attacked, penetrating the enemy system to a depth of 5,000 yards the first day. On the next day the line was still further advanced, and the Battery became out of range. The 6-in. howitzers in the 91st Brigade had meanwhile moved forward, but the 9.2 in. howitzers remained at BEAURAINS until September 6th. The officers, however, acted as Brigade Intelligence officers, and the personnel were engaged in finding and firing captured guns.

The Canadian advance is a matter of history, and, in common with other historical events of the war, has not been detailed in this record, which is purely concerned with the 96th Siege Battery. Suffice it to say that the enemy defence stiffened on September 6th along the CANAL DU NORD. The 96th Battery moved up into position at CAGNICOURT, coming into action on the morning of September 7th. While at BEAURAINS, No. 1 gun was dismantled and sent to workshop for necessary repairs. On September 6th this gun was ordered to be brought into action at BEAURAINS, but, by the irony of fate, no sooner had the gun been mounted than the order was received to dismantle and move.

After being in action for one day on the centre line 120° G. at CAGNICOURT, all guns were ordered to slew round to a centre line of 90° G. This began to be reminiscent of the BERLES-BIENVILLERS moves of the autumn of 1916. The powers that be can hardly yet realize what is entailed by the indiscriminate moving and slewing of 9.2-in. howitzers. One may, I think, be pardoned for wondering why the guns should not have been ordered into action originally at 90° Grid.

The enemy appeared to attain a local air supremacy for September 2nd, which was in marked contrast to our undoubted superiority in this respect up to the end of August. The guns had only been in action one day on the new switch when a move was ordered to CALLING CARD WOOD, some distance farther back. This was carried out by sections on the nights of September 13th and 14th. The weather was wet and considerable difficulty was experienced in dumping the 600 rounds which had been ordered there. After only firing 15 rounds in this position a move was ordered on September 20th and carried out to the BOIS DE BOUCHE. Guns were pulled in on the night of the 20th-21st in record time, all guns being in action by 10.30 p.m. The Battery was not as grateful as it might have been on being informed that the four days at CALLING CARD WOOD were to be regarded as in the nature of a rest. On September 21st, however, 800 rounds had been dumped at the BOIS DE BOUCHE position, which was about 5,000 yards from the enemy. Altogether the

period September 2nd-21st may be regarded as a trying one for the Battery. Four moves had been carried out, including the switch, and a large number of rounds dumped. Cpl. Gullick, B.C. Staff, was, on September 22nd, awarded the Military Medal for work carried out at the observation post on August 27th.

The Canadian Corps crossed the CANAL DU NORD on September 27th and captured the HAYNECOURT-BOURLON WOOD line. The Battery soon became out of range, and guns were dismantled and platforms taken up on the following day. Parties went forward every day with a view to finding and firing captured guns. The first of these, under 2nd Lieut. Hammond, captured six prisoners in the clearing up of MARQUION on September 27th. Many rounds were fired from guns of various calibres. The next position of the Battery was LEEK WOOD, to which it went on October 4th, carrying out firing from there on enemy defences about ABANCOURT, etc. On October 6th, 2nd Lieut. Hammond was awarded the Military Cross for his observation post work at the end of August, and shortly afterwards Gunner Cullen and Gunner Wright received the Military Medal for work as linesmen. On October 15th orders were received after dark to reconnoitre a position in BLECOURT and move in that night. A very hard night's work in the rain followed, one gun being in action at dawn the next day and the remainder later on. On the following day the enemy withdrew, enabling the Battery to fire only a few rounds from this position. Guns were then dismantled, and all lorries went forward with the 6-in. batteries of the brigade, the 9.2-in. batteries remaining parked and brigaded together for the time.

For the next fortnight the personnel of the Battery was employed in salvage of ammunition, etc., and on dumps. On November 6th guns, platforms, and stores were moved to LOURCHES and parked. Events in the forward area had moved rapidly in the meantime, culminating on November 11th in the welcome news that "hostilities would cease at 11 a.m., and that troops would stand fast on the line they had reached at that hour." The Germans had agreed to all our terms, and the fighting was over. During the war, the Battery fired 6,339 tons of metal.

Finis coronat opus. Our work is done. We have had times of danger, of discomfort, of anxiety ; we have felt pain and desolation ; we have seen the ruin of homes and fair cities and the mutilation of the face of Nature ; but there is not one of us in the 96th who could not say honestly from his heart, " I am glad I was there." And in the days to come, before the brightly burning fire, when the shadows deepen and all is still, our thoughts will go back to those old times when we strove together for the common cause, and to all those who so cheerfully shared with us the heat and burden of the day. In these memories of ours there are some that are sad, for there has been tragedy in the story of our Battery, but may we not also recall many bright and happy days in the comradeship of our friends.

When we take up this account of our life in France we find the outline of this Battery's history, and to it we apply the embellishment of memory.

At the end we lay down the little book with a feeling of content—content that we were permitted to assist our country to the best of our ability to play its fine part in the greatest of all wars, and content that we belonged to a Battery whose work helped to maintain the high standard of the Royal Regiment to which we had the honour to belong.